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Johnson, Norman M

A brief guide to  
Dunfermline Abbey. [2d ed.]



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A  
Brief Guide  
to  
Dunfermline  
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# *A Brief Guide to Dunfermline Abbey*

*Compiled by*  
**NORMAN M. JOHNSON, B.Sc., F.R.S.G.S.**

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*To Visitors*—The Abbey is open for inspection from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. in summer, and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. in winter, with the exception of Sundays. A charge of 3d. per person is made for admission to the new Abbey Church, but entrance to the Nave is free. The hours of service on Sundays are 11 a.m. and 6.30 p.m.

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Dunfermline Abbey—1226, 1650, 1818.

# Guide to Dunfermline Abbey

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## INTRODUCTION.

SOMETIME during the Seventh Century the Culdee Colony at Iona was dispersed as a result of Viking raids, and settlements were ultimately made at Abernethy, Arbroath, Brechin, Culross, Dunkeld, St Andrews, and other centres. It is conjectured that Dunkeld, being at a point where the Highlander and Lowlander of the period came into frequent conflict, proved unsatisfactory, and the Culdees from there moved south to what is now Dunfermline. It is noteworthy in this connection that Dunkeld Cathedral and Dunfermline Abbey were both dedicated to the Holy Trinity. It is not known when the Culdees reached the site of Dunfermline, but in all probability they erected a church in the 8th or 9th centuries, on ground now occupied by the Abbey. No trace of this church remains, a fact which is not surprising considering that it would be a wooden structure, and having regard also to subsequent building activity.

In 1057 Malcolm Canmore was crowned King of Scotland at Scone, and in 1070 or thereabouts married Princess Margaret, who, with other members of the English Royal Family, had been forced to leave her country as a result of the Norman Conquest. It is assumed that the marriage took place in the Culdee Church.

## THE CHURCH OF MALCOLM AND MARGARET.

Turgot, Margaret's biographer, states that she "founded a church in the place where her nuptials

were celebrated.” Until 1916 it was assumed that the church erected by Malcolm and Margaret was the old Abbey, but in that year Dr P. MacGregor Chalmers, while carrying out excavations beneath the floor of the Nave, discovered the foundations of a church.

This church was begun about 1072, and the extent of the foundations is indicated by a gun-metal strip on the Nave floor. The church, between 80 and 90 feet in length, had a semi-circular apse at the east end where the high altar was situated; and a square tower at the west end. It is said that it was not completed at the time of Malcolm's death in 1093.

Malcolm and his eldest son Edward were slain at the siege of Alnwick Castle in Northumberland, and at the same time Margaret was lying ill in Edinburgh. It is said that she died shortly after the news was conveyed to her by Ethelrede, a younger son. Her body was carried to Dunfermline and she was buried “opposite the altar and the venerable image of the Holy Rood which she had erected.” The Holy Rood referred to here was set above the High Altar.

Wyntoun (“*Orygynale Cronikil of Scot.*”), writing in the late 14th or early 15th century, says:—

*“ And wyth that body thai past syne  
But ony lat til Dunfermelyne.  
Befor the Rwde Awtare wyth honoure  
Scho wes layd in Haly Sepulture.  
Thare hyre Lord wes layd alsua  
And wyth thame hyre sounnys twa.”*

Malcolm's body was buried at Tynemouth in 1093, removed to Dunfermline by Alexander I., and re-interred, not near Margaret, but further east. Owing to her great benefactions to the church, Margaret was

canonized in 1250, and it is of interest to note that as early as 1200 there is a reference to her original tomb as being a shrine.

#### DAVID'S NAVE—EXTERIOR.

The old Abbey, as we know it, is the Nave of the large church begun by David I., the “sair sanct,” in 1124 and consecrated in 1150. The following extract (with modifications) is taken from Henderson’s “Annals of Dunfermline” :—

“The church, which in its length lies east and west, is about 112 feet long and 65 feet broad, outside measures. In the north front are six Norman windows with six peaked small windows above with six flat pilasters between them, rising from the ground to the first roof; the top of the wall is ornamented with a common Norman design; to the right is seen the north entrance to the church. The arch of this entrance consists of a series of Norman semi-circles, above which are small pilasters and ornamented semi-circular arches, capped with a splay roof of stone, similar to that above the west entrance. The under north wall is 36 feet in height and 5 feet thick; above this wall is the first roof, which rises to another wall, supported on the great massive pillars inside the church. This top part is the clerestory (54 feet in height), and has six small semi-circular windows. Above the upper wall rose the high roof, much higher than the present one, reaching from the east to the west gable between the towers. The south wall of the church was similar in all its details to the north wall now described. The south tower fell in 1807 and was replaced in 1810. The north tower, it is said, was ‘cast down’ during the time of the Reformation in

1560, and when re-built, a spire was added. The great western entrance projects a few feet out from the west gable within which rise ten tall, slender, stone pillars, five on each side of the entrance. The pillars in each row are in close proximity to each other, and recede at a sharp angle into the recess on which they stand. Each of these pillars rests on a double base, and is surmounted with an ornamented capital from which spring five semi-circular arches of different heights. The large stones of the several arches are exposed to view, showing their beautiful designs, some being a continuation of zig-zags, others floriated and otherwise ornamented. The first or outer arch stones are twenty-three in number, on eleven of which are carved heads. The first arch is 20 feet in height and 16 in breadth."

The south and north buttresses, the north porch, and the steeple were no part of the original fabric, the first-named being added in 1620 and 1675 respectively. The Norman doorway at the east end of the Nave, on the south side, is beautifully preserved, as it was covered by the Royal Vault for centuries, and only uncovered within recent times (1903).

The view from the Bartizan walk encircling the steeple is extensive, and embraces portions of 14 counties. This walk is about 100 feet above the ground and 400 feet above sea level. The building, although somewhat on a smaller scale, must have been strikingly similar to Durham Cathedral. This is clear from old engravings showing the Lantern Tower which fell in 1716.

#### DAVID'S NAVE—INTERIOR.

The north porch has a ribbed ceiling with sculptured keystones containing two defaced shields

supported by angels with extended wings. One of the mural monuments records the virtues of Adam Rolland of Gask who bequeathed £1000 for the education of fifty poor children of the Burgh. In each wall there is a cavity, probably used for holding collection boxes.

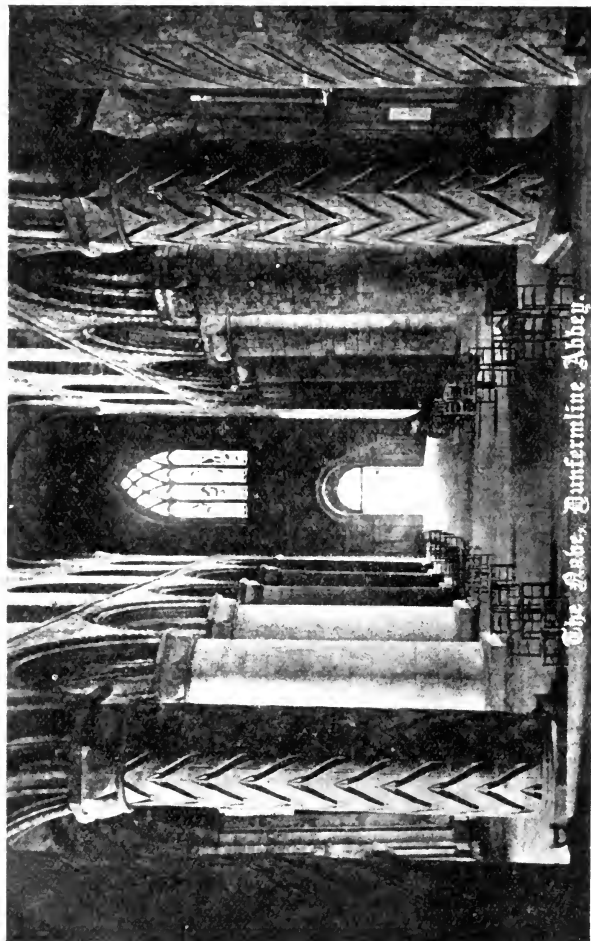
Above the church door is a dedication stone erected at the suggestion of the late Rev. Dr Chalmers. The inscription is as follows:—

ECCLESIA SANCTE TRINITATIS  
DE DUNFERMELYN  
DEDICATA A.D. MCL.

Entering the Nave, on the right, is the monument erected to the memory of William Schaw, Architect to James VI. On the top is a monogram, and below an inscription in Latin. The monument was erected by Queen Anne of Denmark.

Two stone coffins, lying near the west door, were discovered in the centre of the Nave in 1849. The larger one contained a leather shroud which had been wrapped round the body and stitched with a thong from neck to heel and along the soles of the feet. Within were found fragments of bones and a little dark-coloured hair. The other coffin contained bones. The remains are said to be those of the Princes Edward and Ethelrede, sons of Malcolm and Margaret, who, originally, were interred near their mother. The shroud is preserved in the National Museum of Antiquities, Queen Street, Edinburgh, and there is a photograph of it at the entrance to the new part of the Abbey.

Looking to the east, there are six Norman pillars on each side of the Nave, with semi-circular arches



*The Nave, Dunfermline Abbey.*

The Nave—Dunfermline Abbey.



supporting the inner wall. These columns are 20 feet in height, and  $13\frac{1}{2}$  feet in circumference. Two of the pillars are incised with a chevron design, the result of which is to produce an optical illusion, and the pillars appear to be of unequal diameter from top to bottom. The side aisles are  $17\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide, 29 feet high, and 92 feet long. The length of the Nave from the western door to the entrance to the new church is 106 feet, and the breadth 55 feet.

On looking upwards it will be noted that piers and arches support a triforium and clerestory. From these galleries, it is said, "the solemn processions in the nave of the church might be viewed."

The Rood Altar was placed above the line of the High Altar of St Margaret's Church, and facing west, would no doubt be visible from every part of the building. Its base was only detected in 1916.

Robert Pitcairn, Commendator of Dunfermline, Pope's Legate, and Secretary to James VI., was interred in the north aisle in 1584. He it was who had the following words carved on the building in the Maygate known as the "Abbot's House":—

"SEN VORD IS THRALL AND THOCHT IS FRE  
KEIP VEILL THY TONGE I COINSELL THE."

In the same aisle is the monument to George Durie, the last Abbot of Dunfermline. He held office from 1539 to 1560, and granted a charter to the town which was confirmed by James VI. when Dunfermline was constituted a Royal Burgh. The name of George Durie is placed at the top of the memorial, and at the bottom are the Durie coat of arms and the letters H.D. and M.M. The initials refer to Henry, the son of George Durie, and of Margaret Macbeth his wife. In

the family records it is stated that this Margaret Macbeth cured Charles I. of an illness in the Palace of Dunfermline in 1603.

The beautiful Durie Window in blue and yellow stained glass, with the motto "Confido," was erected in 1933, as also was a bronze plate at the base of the memorial giving details of members of the family. While the necessary alterations were proceeding an original dedication mark was discovered. This is in the form of a St Andrew's cross, measuring 4 inches by 4 inches, and may be seen in the stone work to the right of the memorial.

The remains of the Rev. Thomas Gillespie, the founder of the Relief Church of Scotland, are laid a little to the westward of Durie's monument. A marble monument is erected over the burial place of the Halketts of Pitfirrane.

In 1923, when workmen were cleaning the roof of the north (or St Mary's Aisle), they uncovered the original red and blue colouring, the design incorporating chevrons and fleur-de-lis.

A single consecration cross, dating from 1150, is cut on the shaft which supports the vaulting opposite the fifth pillar counting from the west end. It is a Greek cross with enlarged ends, and measures  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches by 8 inches.

In the south (or Rood Aisle), is a fine memorial window erected in 1860 in memory of "Queyne Anabelle Drummond spous to King Robert ye third, mother to King James the fyrst." The stained glass of this window was the first to be placed in the Nave. On the floor of this aisle will be seen a circular stone covering an old well. The ceiling of this aisle dates from 1620.

Over the west door is the large window now known as the Carnegie Window, the stained glass panels of which, showing Malcolm, Margaret, Bruce, and Wallace, were designed by Sir Noel Paton, and the cost borne by Mr Andrew Carnegie.

As was usual with Benedictine Abbey Churches, the parishioners worshipped in the part of the building just described (the "Outer Kirk"), but the clergy used the enclosed choir of the eastern (or "Inner Kirk"), which, also dating from the 12th century, stood on the site now occupied by the new church.

Queen Margaret, Malcolm Canmore, and Alexander I. were all interred in the original church of Malcolm and Margaret, but David I., Malcolm IV., and Robert the Bruce were buried near the High Altar of the eastern church.

Altogether, within the precincts of the Abbey, there were buried 8 Kings, 4 Queens, 5 Princes, and 2 Princesses. When the Nave was in use as a Presbyterian place of worship from 1563 to 1821, the pulpit stood on the central pillar in the north row. It was made of oak and beautifully carved, and on it were the words "Who is sufficient for these things?"

Sir Walter Scott, while visiting Dunfermline in 1822, was so taken with the pulpit that he applied to the Heritors for it. His request was granted, and the pulpit was removed to Abbotsford, where it adorned the entrance hall.

#### THE NEW ABBEY CHURCH—EXTERIOR.

The foundation stone of the new church was laid by Thomas, 7th Earl of Elgin, on the 10th of March 1818, in the presence of the Heritors of the parish, the Provost, Magistrates, and Town Council of the Burgh, the two Parish Ministers, the Kirk Session, the

members of the Presbytery, and others. In September 1821 the building was finished and opened for public worship. It is of Gothic architecture, with tall handsome windows and a square tower near the east end. On the summit of the tower, instead of the usual balustrade, are four words KING ROBERT THE BRUCE on the four sides in capital letters of open hewn work, four feet in height.

The shrine of St Margaret, now outside the new church, was originally inside that part of the eastern church added to the 12th century structure about the middle of the 13th century.

Mr F. C. Eeles (in "Burgh Records of Dunfermline," edited by the late Erskine Beveridge, LL.D.), says "The base of St Margaret's shrine, made of blue and white marble, . . . still exists, almost *in situ*, in the extreme eastern part of the church, portions of the east and south walls of which remain to the height of some three feet above the ground of the churchyard outside the east end of the modern church. These walls are the remains of the small aisleless chapel which formed the extreme east end of the thirteenth century church."

Prior to the Reformation the shrine was one of the places to which pilgrimage was regularly made. There are still to be seen in the Parish of Dalmeny, about a mile from South Queensferry, on the Edinburgh road, the remains of a Pilgrim's Cross. It is on the south side of the road at a point where the first view of Dunfermline would be had by pilgrims from the south.

#### THE NEW ABBEY CHURCH—INTERIOR.

King Robert the Bruce died at Cardross, near Dumbarton, in 1329, and was buried in Dunfermline. Wyntoun, alluding to this, says:—

*"In the Kyrke of Dunfermelyne  
Hys bodie wes interryed syne."*

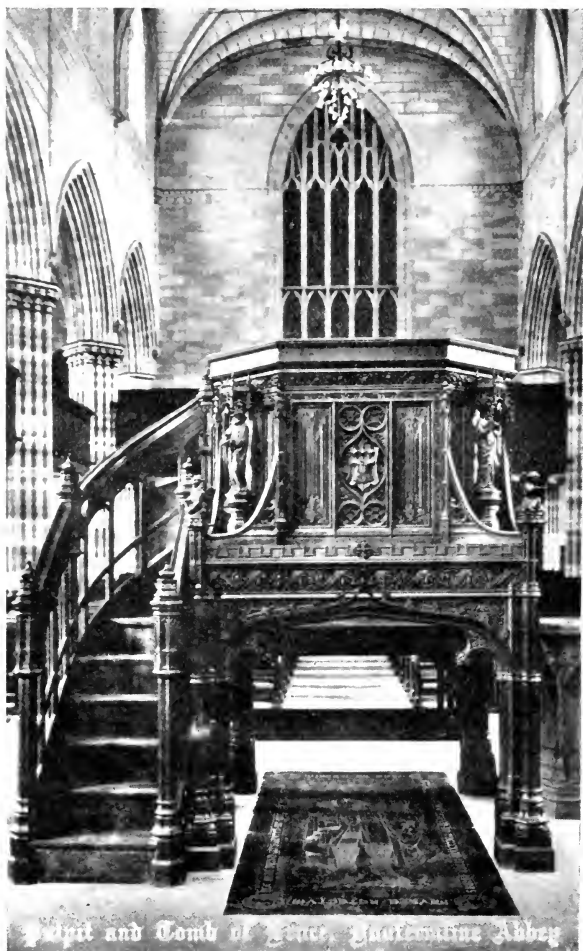
The funeral was attended by “the grate, the good, and the brave of the daie, and the weeping of the multitudes insyde and outsyde the Kyrke, addid solemnitie to the rite.”

In February 1818, when the ground was being cleared preparatory to the building of the new church, workmen came across a vault which proved to contain the remains of King Robert the Bruce. When laid open the vault was found to be built of polished masonry. Within this vault was a smaller one, and inside lay the skeleton of a large body encased in two thin coats of sheet lead. Fragments of a shroud of linen interwoven with gold (*toile d’or*), were found also, and in addition, the remnants of an oaken coffin. After a superficial examination the tomb was closed again until November 1819, when a second, and this time, an official inspection was made. It was found that the breastbone of the body had been sawn asunder in order that the heart might be removed in compliance with the Bruce’s dying wish.

The remains were re-interred between the transepts, and ultimately covered by a large rectangular memorial “brass” embedded in a slab of porphyry. The inscription on the “brass” may be translated thus:—“The grave of Robert the Bruce, King of Scots, happily discovered among the ruins in 1818, has been anew marked by this brass in the 560th year after his death.”

Standing above the “brass” is the beautifully carved pulpit.

In 1929, six hundred years after Bruce’s death, an impressive service was held in the new Abbey Church, when an oration was delivered by the present Earl of Elgin.



The Pulpit—Dunfermline Abbey.

Copyright—H. T. Macpherson.

In 1858 there was erected in the north transept of the church the front of the ancient Royal Gallery which formerly was in the Nave, nearly opposite the pulpit. The defaced royal arms of Scotland and Denmark were renewed with the letters J.R. and A.R. (Jacobus Rex; Anna Regina), and the date 1610. As the panelling was not long enough to extend the whole breadth of the transept, two side pieces were added in which were inserted inscriptions to commemorate ten of the royal, and two of the other distinguished persons who were interred within the walls of both churches.

Running round the interior of the church is a frieze upon which at intervals are placed the coats of arms of the Kings and Queens of Scotland buried within the Abbey walls, as well as those of Charles I., who was baptised in the Abbey, and of certain Abbots, Noblemen, and Heritors.

Note should also be taken of the eastern, or McLaren Memorial Window, and the monuments to several members of the Bruce family, whose burial vault is below the south transept.

The magnificent window in the South Transept, designed by Alexander Strachan, was dedicated in 1932 in remembrance of John Fisher, of Newlands, and Isabella Lawrie Bruce, his wife.

The subject of the window is "Queen Margaret of Scotland." The subject of the Five Lancet Lights in the lower tier is the Marriage of Malcolm Canmore and Margaret, attended by their Ladies and Knights. The marriage ceremony is believed to have taken place in Dunfermline, and was conducted by the Bishop of St Andrews. The doves introduced into these Lights are emblematic—an emblem frequently given to Queen Margaret to denote her character—

*i.e.*, “ Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

The subject of the Five Lancet Lights in the upper tier above the Transome Bar, represents Queen Margaret in the act of instructing her children to give alms to the Poor and Needy—seen on the extreme right. Malcolm, who has just entered with one of his sons, sits down to watch. On the extreme left is a Bishop, bringing a Master Mason (who has a plan of a Church on his drawing board) to Queen Margaret to submit his plan for her approval. On the upper portions of the extreme Left and Right Lights are two angels to represent music.

Queen Margaret, we are told, was very fond of beautiful raiment, and encouraged her Ladies to make and wear more becoming garments. She also instructed them to make beautiful embroideries for Church purposes, and, in the background of the upper Lancet Lights are Ladies embroidering an Altar Cloth, and on the left one is seen weaving at a loom.

In the Tracery Lights are the heraldic shields of Queen Margaret, and the Lion rampant of Scotland for Malcolm. In the centre Tracery Panel is the Ship with a dove under it. The Ship represents The Church and the symbolism is “ The Church resting upon the Holy Spirit.”

There are six emblems of the Virtues in the upper Tracery Lights—reading from left to right they are :—

“ Prudence ”—A Serpent on a Cleft Stick.

“ Perseverance ”—A Crown.

“ Faith ”—A Chalice.

“ Hope ”—An Anchor.

“ Justice ”—A Balance.

“ Gentleness ”—A Lamb.



The beautifully carved Lectern was gifted by the late John Fisher.

The Stevenson Memorial, in bronze, designed by G. H. Paulin, was erected on the wall of the North Transept in 1933. It and three ornamental Communion Chairs, which may be seen in front of the Pulpit, are in memory of the late Rev. Robert Stevenson, M.A., who was minister of the Abbey for 51 years, from 1880 to 1931.

### THE MONASTERY.

In 1124 David I. raised the Abbey Church to the dignity of an Abbey, and brought to it thirteen monks from Canterbury. There were also thirteen Culdees. Geoffrey of Canterbury was chosen Abbot in 1124, but was not actually consecrated until 1128. The last Abbot was George Durie, referred to previously, who fled to France in 1560 during the troublous times of the Reformation. Between 1124 and 1560 Dunfermline Abbey had 37 Abbots.

The Monastery buildings lay immediately south of the Abbey, and consisted of Chapter House, Dormitories, the Frater or Refectory, and the Infirmary.

Between the Frater and the Nave was an enclosed Cloister Court or Garth. By the middle of the 13th century the establishment was one of the most extensive and wealthy in the whole of Scotland. Matthew Paris (Matthew of Westminster), one of the chroniclers of the period, says that "the limits were so great as to contain so many princely edifices that three distinguished sovereigns with their retinues might be accommodated with lodgings at the same time without inconvenience to one another."

Of these splendid buildings only parts of the Frater remain, and also a tower connecting the Monastery with the Royal Palace. Near the east end of the Frater wall there is a small room, 12 feet by 5 feet, with rib-vaulting. From this pulpit, portions of the Scriptures were read aloud during meals by one of the novices.

In the west gable there is a large Gothic window with six mullions and a great deal of tracery above. It dates from the 14th century.

Within recent years the soil, which had accumulated for centuries in the Frater, was removed, and the walls and floor of a lower hall were laid bare.

The connecting tower is arched, and forms a gateway between St Catherine's Wynd and Monastery Street, locally known as "The Pends." Through the tower there is a communication between the Frater Hall and the King's Kitchen of the Palace, a convenience which the monks would appreciate as they were entitled to certain supplies from the Royal Kitchen.

Edward I. and his army paid a hostile visit to Dunfermline in November 1303, and remained during the winter. When they left in spring they set fire both to Monastery and Palace. The Monastery was afterwards partially repaired, but never attained its former splendour. Froissart states that the buildings were once more destroyed by Richard II. in 1385.

The grounds of the Abbey and Monastery were surrounded by a high wall, a fact which determined the direction of certain streets. Thus the Maygate, Abbot Street, and Canmore Street were ultimately laid out to the north of the wall, and Priory Lane to the south. Gardens to the west of houses in the New Row, ran, generally speaking, to the section of the wall

which lay north and south. A well-preserved portion of the wall may still be seen in Canmore Street, near the foot of the Free School Close. It is of interest to note that in the Burgh Records of 1525 there is a reference to the Monastery plumber.

### THE ROYAL PALACE.

The south-west wall of the Palace is all that now remains of a most extensive structure. It is 205 feet long and 60 in height, and is supported by 8 buttresses. Near the south-eastern end of the wall is an oriel window, in the ceiling of which is a piece of sculpture visible from below. The sculpture is a graphic illustration of Luke, Ch. I., verses 28-38, and is known as the "Annunciation Stone." It represents the angel Gabriel with outspread wings, and the Virgin Mary in an attitude of devotion. In his right hand the angel holds a sceptre, and in his left hand is a scroll, inscribed as follows:—

AVE · GRATIA · PLENA · DNS · TECV.

At the top is a human head and face with a crown of glory, the emblem of God the Father, and to the left, a dove. There is also shown a two-handed pot containing a lily, the emblem of purity. In the lower part of the stone is a shield bearing the arms of George Durie. The arms consist of a shield with a chevron between three crescents.

The original building, a Guest House converted into a Palace, may have been built in the 13th century, and is said to have been re-built in 1315 following the destruction carried out by the orders of Edward I.

In the Palace were born David II., James I., the Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, and the ill-fated

## *Guide to Dunfermline Abbey.*

Charles I. Tradition still points out the window and fireplace of the room near the west end in which he was born in 1600. The last King to occupy the Palace was Charles II. who, in response to the demands of the Covenanters, subscribed to the Solemn League and Covenant in August 1650. The document is known as "The Dunfermline Declaration."

A reference to the expected visit of the King is found in the Kirk Session Records (23rd July), as follows :—

"This day the Session being publiclie desyrit to convey after the blessing, no meeting was, Everie one being so taken up with the present troubles of warr and putting out of soldiers to our Armie against Cromwell, and preparing for the King's coming to the Town."

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